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Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

In the Matter of
Toll Free Service Access Codes

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CC Docket No. 95-155

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COMMENTS OF THE
NATIONAL TELEPHONE COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

The National Telephone Cooperative Association ("NTCA") hereby submits these Comments in response to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking released by the Commission in this docket on October 5, 1995 ("NPRM"). The Commission is asking for public comment on a number of proposals concerning the efficient use of toll free numbers. The NPRM asks for comment on proposals to ensure the fair and efficient use of toll free numbers and an implementation plan for the next toll free code beyond 888. NTCA is a national association of approximately 500 small local exchange carriers ("LECs") providing telecommunications services to interexchange carriers ("IXCs") and subscribers throughout rural America.

The Commission offers several proposals regarding a variety of toll free numbering issues. The Commission discusses conservation efforts to maximize the efficient use of the available toll-free numbers including possible deposits to reserve numbers and the possible use of Personal Identification Numbers to multiply the use of individual toll-free numbers. In addition, the NPRM also is examining administrative issues associated with future industry introduction of and transition to new toll-free codes. Finally, the Commission also asks for comment on issues surrounding the use and expansion of alpha/numerically significant toll-free numbers.

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Regarding each of these numbering issues, NTCA urges the Commission to consider the broader public policy interests that may not be fully addressed by strictly competitive forces. It is imperative that broader public policy goals and objectives be accommodated as the industry moves forward with its transition into a more competitive environment. Hence, NTCA asks that the Commission carefully examine each of the numbering issues and other toll free matters to avoid policies that would, in effect, transfer number resources only to the larger players.¹ Public interest demands that all users and providers of the nation's public switched network have "equal access" to numbering resources.

Also included in the NPRM are proposals to improve the transition process associated with introducing a new toll free code. The Commission proposes that all network switches have the software needed to support all toll free codes reserved by the industry in January 1995 installed by February 1997.² Further, the practice of routing 888 calls through a tandem while routing 800 calls through an end office is deemed an inefficient and unnecessarily costly practice for the interconnecting carriers that have circuits carrying their 800 calls from LEC end offices.³

NTCA asks that the Commission keep in mind that for clearly ubiquitous service offerings such as toll-free 800 and 888, LECs have sufficient motivation to make service available to their subscribers and interconnecting carriers. NTCA is confident that LECs will

¹ As one example, small and rural switch operators should not lose out to urban, large volume network providers in a struggle over the availability of central office switch codes.

² NPRM at para. 29.

³ Id. at para. 30.

want to ensure the ability of end users to originate 800 or 888 calls. On the contrary, LECs have shown in the past a willingness to either upgrade their switching equipment or find alternative routing such that toll free service can be provided. It is therefore unnecessary to enact rules that require all companies to install certain network software by a date certain. Instead, the Commission should allow smaller LECs the flexibility to assess their network needs and upgrade software as prudent economics allow.

Secondly, network configuration options in which 800 (or 888) service are accomplished through various means must be evaluated in terms of relative cost efficiency, equal service provision and quality. LECs seek the proper balance among these considerations. Any decision to route 888 traffic in different ways, or any other service solution in the future whereby different solutions are used that properly balance cost with benefit, should not be seen only from the point of view as having a negative impact on competition.⁴ The Commission should proceed by affording greater flexibility to LECs, and particularly those operating in high cost areas, as it addresses changing network needs.⁵

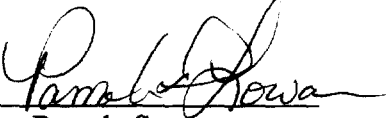
⁴ This is the same approach the Commission afforded small LECs in CC Docket No. 86-10 by allowing alternative means by which 800 database could be accomplished. See 8 FCC Rcd 907.

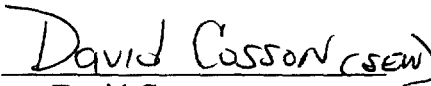
⁵ In this same regard, the Commission should not impose costly imperatives for network upgrades on providers highly challenged by service to high cost areas while inconsistently reducing high cost recovery provisions. See, generally, NTCA Comments filed on October 10, 1995, in CC Docket No. 80-286 regarding high cost allocation rules.

In conclusion, NTCA urges the Commission to carefully consider public policy goals when developing guidelines for the 888 and future toll free code numbering issues and for the mechanics by which a new toll free code will be introduced. Furthermore, network software scheduling requirements should not be rigidly imposed on all companies, and the Commission should recognize that the practice of routing 888 calls through a tandem and 800 calls through an end office may be a prudent solution for future toll free codes. The Commission should, instead, offer LECs flexibility as they seek to provide toll free service in a manner which accounts for both needed services and cost.

Respectfully submitted,

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November 1, 1995

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Gail C. Malloy, certify that a copy of the foregoing
Comments of the National Telephone Cooperative Association in
CC Docket 95-155 was served on this 1st day of November 1995, by
first-class, U.S. Mail, postage prepaid, to the following persons
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